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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of higher education reform movements in the United States. While some of the 18th and 19th century reforms in the country are described, the emphasis is on the 20th century. Early in this period, the debate over general education and the need for a required core curriculum was central. McCarthyism influenced higher education in the early 1950s, as did the social unrest and personal development movements of the 1960s. The economic downturn of the 1970s resulted in consolidation of the system, faculty unionization, and a concern over equity issues. Students became increasingly interested in career-oriented studies. The 1980s were a decade of reform. "A Nation at Risk," released in 1983, inspired the formation of blue-ribbon commissions in 33 states to examine educational policies. States became increasingly interested in accountability and student outcomes, and less concerned about equity and access. In the 1990s, five areas have been the target of debates: (1) educational purpose-the importance of vocational training and specialization; (2) diversity of learners-the debate between elitism and egalitarianism; (3) content-the increasing influence of external constituents on curriculum; (4) instructional process-the influence of technology; and (5) evaluation-the call for accountability. Contains 29 references. (CAK)

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REFORM IN AMERICAN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its landmark report, *A Nation at Risk*, a scathing indictment of the nation's primary and secondary school systems. It would have been difficult to find an educator who was not familiar with the report's opening salvo:

> The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. (Boyer, 1985)

Although the report was directed toward the nation's public K-12 school systems, it had significant ramifications for segments of higher education, as did the spate of reports which followed, some of which were directed toward the nation's higher education systems. These reports represented yet another phase of educational reform, a cyclic process which has characterized American public higher education since its inception.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the reform movements within American higher education.

REFORM IN AMERICAN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

> . . . We are struck with the fact that one reform follows so closely upon the other that the schools seem to be in a perpetual process of being reformed. Yet while many have been willing to "reform" the schools, few have taken the time or the trouble to evaluate past reforms, or even to see if they have actually been implemented. . . . Reform movements . . . are fraught with contradictions, not because politicians and pedagogues are blind to their inconsistencies, but because major reform efforts have diverse and contradictory sources. Discontent with the schools today, as in the past, is often in reality discontent about something else: crime, the state of the economy, racial unrest, poverty, and unfavorable balance of trade. . . . In the past school reform has been noticeably unsuccessful when it has focused on social, political, and economic issues the schools could not and may never have been able to resolve. (Kelly & Seller, 1985)

Attempts at reform are perhaps as much a tradition in higher education as the conferring of degrees at the end of each academic year, although the call for reform comes most often from outside the educational system, not from within. Because higher education is perceived to be the major means of acquiring and disseminating new knowledge, providing a skilled workforce, and preserving and transferring cultural values from one generation to another, it should be of constant interest to the public, legislators, and of course, educators. However, that interest waxes and wanes with the economic, political, and social state of the nation, but especially the economic state. When things "go well," systems, -- including higher education -- are perceived to be successful, doing whatever it is they are intended to do. When things "go poorly," when the economy falters, when there is international conflict, or when there is racial unrest in the nation's cities, those same systems are re-evaluated in hopes of finding an obvious culprit and a quick-fix solution. American higher education is not immune from this scrutiny although it is certainly less exposed than the nation's elementary and secondary systems and, until recently, has been held much less accountable.

Following is a brief overview of the reform movements through the nineteenth century, followed by a more detailed description and discussion of the reform movements of the twentieth century, especially those which occurred in the 1980s. Fifteen years have passed since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, long enough to determine the impact of that report and many of the others which followed in its wake.

Development of American Higher Education to 1900

The twelfth century in Europe is generally considered to be the time during which the modern university was created and many of its major features established, including degrees, faculties, colleges, courses, and commencement (Levine, 1978). Forms of specialized learning, principally law and medicine, were created in response to social needs and demands as a result of the revival of trade and towns (Swoboda, 1979). The demand for these professions spawned a steady increase in the number of new universities, which grew from six new ones in the twelfth century to 36 new ones in the fifteenth. With the Renaissance, the degree and pace of change increased markedly. The rebirth of towns and the expansion of trade meant a greater and more rapid exchange of knowledge and commensurate growth in the nature and scope of the curriculum. By the seventeenth century, and the colonization of North America, most of the countries of Europe had established universities based on the medieval model, which was very hierarchical, rigid, and formalized (Levine, 1978).

In America, the first college, Harvard College, was founded in 1636 in Massachusetts. By the time of the American Revolutionary War, more than 15 colleges had been founded, nine of which still exist. As Levine (1978) notes, "The colonial college was a teaching institution, which provided instruction in classical knowledge and intellectual skills." Graduates were

prepared for "socially prestigious vocations, often as clergymen." From the colonial period came many of the fundamental elements of modern American higher education, including the four-year course of study, bachelor's and master's degrees, and general education.

The relationship between the colonies and American colleges in the Colonial Period has been characterized as "intense, bilateral, and cooperative" (Kerr, 1994). In fact, a chartered college was a coveted resource for a colony. Although all of the later colonial colleges were controlled by Protestant religious sects, in effect, there was no distinction made between public and private (Levine, 1978). All colleges were public because they were integral to the colonies and chartered by civic government. Colleges such as Princeton, which was founded as the College of New Jersey, did not acquire private status until the mid-nineteenth century (Thelin, 1994).

One significant change which occurred during the eighteenth century was the transformation of the relationship between government and higher education. By the late eighteenth century, the role of a civil government to authorize and support colleges within its domain underwent a dramatic reversal that fundamentally changed colleges' relations with American society. The national government transferred the responsibility and authority to create or oversee educational institutions to the states, thus determining the nature and scope of the federal role in the future development of higher education. It would be a very different role than that of most foreign governments which developed highly centralized, national systems of education. The effects on American higher education were several. One was to decentralize the educational system, which would eventually result in systems of higher education that would prove resistant to the standardization that the American public would periodically call for. Second, after 1800 many state governments, especially in the South and West, would abandon

the customary restraints colonial governments had shown in granting college charters. As a result, the nineteenth century would be the era of the "booster college." Some have argued that these government policies allowed the over-building of colleges and fundamentally weakened American higher education (Thelin, 1994).

Another force which had considerable effect on American higher education during this time was the impact of European university models. Levine (1978) notes that the European influences adopted by American colleges during this period were adopted through a process of accretion and addition. That is, new functions, new subjects, new teaching strategies, new courses, and new students were added to the existing models, resulting in what Levine calls *multiversities* – large and complex institutions with multiple purposes. For example, there was considerable impact created by the immigration of Scottish doctors to the colonies and the simultaneous enrollment of American colonists in the medical school of the University of Edinburgh. The Scottish influence encouraged American colleges to offer more practical subjects such as medicine and to expand studies in the natural sciences. From France and the Enlightenment came the impetus to add the study of modern languages and teacher education, as well as the sciences. However, it was probably the German university which had the most profound impact on American higher education in the nineteenth century, particularly in respect to the development of graduate studies and the establishment of the research function. It was primarily the creation of research facilities that transformed the American college into the American university (Swoboda, 1979).

The nineteenth century in American public higher education was a time of dramatic growth and change from the colonial system which had preceded it. It was marked by several periods of educational reform, many of them reactions to increasing specialization and its impact

on general education. In American higher education, the classical colonial curriculum began to give way to one in which intellectual skills were valued more than possession of a prescribed body of knowledge. This change was partially due to concerns over the increasing number of subjects and disciplines and partially due to the degree to which students were given the freedom to select their own courses of study and to specialize. Perhaps the greatest cause of the increased specialization and development in disciplines, however, was the evolution of the natural sciences. New disciplines such as chemistry, astronomy, physics, and biology had begun to appear by the early 1800s. The sciences became the model for other fields of knowledge, for example psychology. An indirect cause for the expansion of the natural sciences was industrialization and its need for trained specialists (Swoboda, 1979). The nineteenth century also saw the beginning of the major system which coincided with the rise of specializations and would result in a system of major and general education distribution requirements by the early twentieth century (Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

There were other changes in the nineteenth century which resulted in increased access to higher education. The passage of two federal land-grant acts had several significant effects on the development of American higher education. In 1862, the Morrill Land-Grant Act was passed. This legislation authorized the sale of federal lands to provide funds for the support of colleges offering instruction in "agriculture and mechanic arts without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics" (Levine, 1978). After the Civil War, a second Morrill Land-Grant Act was passed in 1890. This act provided for an annual federal appropriation to land-grant colleges and encouragement for similar state support. During the rest of the nineteenth century, access continued to increase, although it was also dependent upon expansion and improvements in public high school education. It should be noted, however, that

increased access did not include everyone. For example, as a result of anti-Semitism, the response to an influx of Jewish immigrants in the 1900s, many of whom wanted to pursue an intellectual life, was to raise admissions standards at some universities (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). In spite of, or perhaps because of an increased demand for higher education, assumptions of educational elitism remained. The single most important feature of the relation between American society and higher education was that "going to college" came to be viewed as a way of "getting ahead" (Thelin, 1994). After 1880 the attractiveness of colleges appealed to new, wealthy donors as well as to an expanding student constituency. As a result, there was an unexpected groundswell of philanthropy which revitalized American higher education and would come to play an increasingly important role in determining its priorities.

Another result of the land-act grants was that students had more choice, a phenomenon that was bolstered by a 40-year campaign begun in 1869 for an elective system led by President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard. His proposal would have a profound effect on American undergraduate education. Eliot proposed an elective system with the goals of increasing student freedom and responsibility in the choice of their studies. This recommendation reflected Eliot's view of the moral purpose of the university, which he believed was to facilitate the development of self-control and self-reliance through liberty (Flexner, 1979). The effects of the elective system were divided. On the one hand, electives provided undergraduates with more opportunities to specialize. On the other hand, electives caused the institution to react with a defensive rigidity as the traditional core curriculum was threatened (Flexner, 1979). This phenomenon was less true of public institutions, at least initially. As those land grant colleges and universities which were established as a result of the first Morrill Act in 1862 broadened their vocational and technical character, they too adopted the disciplinary notions and practices

of the older and more prestigious universities. The major field is said to have been created partly to stem the rising tide of student free choice of courses in the late 1800s (Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

As noted earlier, the response to the increase in the number of subjects and disciplines in higher education led to several periods of educational reform in the nineteenth century, characterized at different times by entrenchment or innovation. The most notable example of entrenchment, which took the form of a defense of general education, was the Yale Report of 1828, a clear and sophisticated expression of the curricular *status quo*. The report objected to practical and vocational studies and supported the notion of a totally prescribed curriculum that was discipline-based and organized (Flexner, 1979). Not surprisingly, the report was embraced by the established academic community, many of whom had been trained by Yale. Debates over specialization vs. general education in the higher education curriculum are one of the driving forces behind reform movements. General vs. specialized education became polarized at the end of the nineteenth century when three types of college missions could be clearly distinguished: (1) utilitarian, (2) research, and (3) liberal arts. The counter movement to what was perceived as overspecialization of students and a fragmentation of knowledge was the concept of general education, either through a required number of courses or a core curriculum (Davis, 1995). In the last decades of the nineteenth century there began yet another push away from specialization and toward general education.

The land-grant acts had another important effect. The Morrill Acts and others were factors in creating the first period of emphasis on quality control in the final decade of the nineteenth century (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Both the state and the federal governments had a vested interest in quality. However, the federal government's ability to set standards and monitor them was possible for the most part only through the funding it provided. In the

nineteenth century, states served as intermediaries in federal patronage of higher education. The federal grants to states were broad and carried few restrictions (Gladieux, Hauptman, & Knapp, 1994). Toward the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the pattern would begin to change. Federal support would become piecemeal and begin to go directly to institutions themselves, bypassing state governments. Ultimately, nearly all federal monies would be channeled to institutions or to individual students. In fact, there would be virtually no conscious meshing of funding purposes and patterns between the federal and state levels of government (Gladieux et al., 1994). For many years, the federal government largely restricted its involvement in education to funding research, subsidizing the land grant colleges established under the 1865 Morrill Act, and underwriting vocational education following the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917.

> Despite the Morrill Act and subsequent agricultural research legislation, one can hardly say that prior to World War II there was a significant, conscious federal "public policy" toward higher education. If one wants to find any semblance of a coherent nationwide "policy" involving higher education between 1900 and 1940, one must look not to the federal government, but to the initiatives and programs carried out by the great private philanthropic foundations of Carnegie and Rockefeller. (Thelin, 1994)

Like the federal government, the leverage of the private sector on higher education was exercised through the funding it provided. Whether the support came from public or private sources, universities would find that in order to sustain funding, they would need to be responsive and accountable to external interests and expectations of accountability which would only increase over time.

In summary, there were a number of important changes that occurred in the nineteenth century that would have long-term implications for the further development of higher education. These included a shift in the relationship between higher education and government and a

transfer of control from the federal government to the states. However, the federal government would retain significant influence via federal funding in some sectors of higher education and financial aid to students. The passage of the land-grant acts plus a public belief in the value of higher education laid the foundation for a dramatic period of growth and increased access. With the expansion in the number of disciplines began the first in a continuing cycle of debates over the proper balance between specialization and general education and between a prescribed curriculum and student choice.

Reform Movements – The Twentieth Century

Higher education in the twentieth century has been no less affected by external forces than the earliest European universities, which reacted to the growth of towns and trade by shaping the curriculum to prepare a skilled labor force for business, law, and medicine. Two world wars, the Korean and Vietnam wars, a depression, a recession, and the launching of a Russian satellite were some of the major events which had direct and significant impact on higher education. This impact was apparent in the on-going debates over the purpose of higher education and centered on the issue of specialization vs. general education. Through the nineteenth century, there had been steady growth in the number of subjects taught in the nation's colleges and universities and a steady move toward specialization.

Faculty reacted to the threat of overspecialization by launching a period of general education reform between 1900 and 1930. In 1918, one-third of Columbia's curriculum was prescribed, i.e., required. By 1938, fully half of Columbia's curriculum was prescribed because of concern that the elective system was destroying the unity of the curriculum. There were also external reasons to promote general education. As a result of World War I, there was increased interest in moral philosophy and ideological discussions. Also, the resulting fragmentation and

renewed sense of nationalism led to reconstruction of a core in the undergraduate curriculum. Finally, there were economic pressures. The depression made specialization less attractive than generalization (Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

The debate over general education highlighted two different prevailing views about the purpose of undergraduate education: rationalist and progressive. The rationalists favored a traditional liberal education based on the assumption that an array of information is the hallmark of an educated person. The rationalist model emphasizes content over learning; intellectual development over integration of emotional, social, moral and intellectual life; contemplation over action; progressive differentiation of knowledge versus integration; and increasing specialization versus broader, more meaningful context (McConnell, 1952). In opposition to the rationalists were those who favored an instrumentalist or progressive orientation (Taylor, 1979), which "seeks maximum development of the individual for common good and puts a high premium on creativity and inventiveness" (McGrath & Spear, 1991). Bennington College, founded in 1932, is perhaps the best example of a higher educational institution founded on the instrumentalist/progressive orientation.

Attempts to strike a balance between specialization and generalization continued as external forces, most notably World War II, continued to encourage more specialization in higher education. In 1945, Harvard published General Education in a Free Society, known as the Harvard "Redbook," which called for balance and a need for general education. But with Russia's launching of Sputnik in 1957, the pendulum swung back towards specialization and from the 1950s through the 1970s, there was another push toward specialization because of technological advances.

The Golden Age: 1950-1968

The period during and after World War II was a time of great transformation, a time of heightened intervention and of new initiatives: federal support of scientific research, equality of opportunity and labor force requirements. These initiatives were not exactly "new," – all had been addressed to different degrees at earlier points in the development of American higher education. However, this time the issues were more complex and the speed with which the problems were emerging and demanded resolution was much faster. In fact, in the half century between 1920 and 1970, American higher education enjoyed an unprecedented period of support and expansion. In structural terms it meant that public higher education would shift from the model of a single great flagship university and move increasingly toward an arrangement of multi-campus systems (Thelin, 1994).

The years from 1947 to 1958 were a period of readjustment following World War II. It began with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill) and concluded with the emergence of higher education as a major factor in the development of American society. A 1957 report by the President's Committee on Education Beyond High School was generated in anticipation of the need to expand higher education to meet the demand. President Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals published its report, *Goals for Americans*, which called for more community colleges, state planning for higher education, low interest loans for construction, graduate fellowships, more student loan funds and higher loan amounts. Though not expressed in so many words, the proposed creation of a vast network of community colleges as well as an expanded and upgraded system of four-year colleges suggested simultaneous pursuit of the goals of improved quality and wider access (Hansen & Stampen, 1994).

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a massive expansion of enrollments and broadened missions which society supported through increased allocations. The hallmark of the post W.W.II period was massive growth in all sectors of American higher education. World War II was possibly the single most diversifying factor in higher education. Over 2.2 million veterans returned to or entered colleges. They were not the "typical" student. In fact, the "typical" student rapidly began to disappear (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). The students entering higher education tended to be more diverse, older, had families of their own to support, held jobs, and attended part-time.

Initially, these students were quite conservative. Then, "after a gradual enrollment increase into the early 60s, an explosion of enrollments occurred as the baby-boom population reached maturity" (Hansen & Stampen, 1994). During the 1960s and 70s, the more diverse student population proved to be the strongest advocate of greater choice and as a result, tighter distribution requirements, now considered "establishment," were loosened (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Student activists on campus encouraged relevance and freedom and liberals outnumbered conservatives two to one. By the 1990s, however, a tremendous shift in the balance of liberals and conservatives on campus would occur. The issues associated with the 60s political and social movements would eventually be seen as relatively mainstream issues and no longer "liberal" causes (Dey & Hurtado, 1994). In the 60s, the nation's colleges and universities were centers of protest against the Vietnam War. However, the campus crisis of the 60s went deeper than the antiwar movement to include issues of civil rights. A larger, more diverse student population, less committed to traditional academic values, protested against social and economic policies which had historically worked to deny access and equal opportunity to under-

represented groups. Students' response to social and political events had a great effect on the institutions and their faculty.

Like the students, faculty had issues which could not be ignored. As student numbers expanded rapidly, so did the number of faculty; the profession tripled in size. The hiring boom of this period shaped the vision of the academic profession for several decades to come just as prolonged stagnation now affects perceptions and makes it difficult for colleges to respond to contemporary needs. Postwar growth created the sense among faculty that such growth was the norm, that the changes they were experiencing in a "seller's market" were permanent, when in fact they were not (Altbach, 1994). Nonetheless, institutions and their members planned for the future as though they were permanent. The especially rapid expansion of higher education in the decade of the 1960s has special relevance for the 90s, for the abnormally large cohort of young academics which entered the profession in the 60s is causing problems related to its size, training, and experiences. This group has limited the entry of new scholars to the profession and has created a "bulge" of tenured faculty members who are expected to retire in massive numbers in the 1990s and cause an unprecedented shift in the academic profession (Altbach, 1994).

In spite of the fact that it was a seller's market insofar as faculty were concerned, there were difficult moments. The American professoriate faced a crisis of confidence during the McCarthy Era of the early 1950s. It became apparent that there were structural protections which the university would and would not provide faculty when dealing with the external social and political environment. Generally, administrators tended to overreact, being more stringent toward their own faculty than the public or legislators. Faculty were left with the implication that civil rights and professional protection were not givens but very much subject to external political, social and economic conditions (Thelin, 1994).

The campus turmoil of the 1960s, in which many professors actively participated, also had a great effect on the profession. Vietnam, racial unrest and other social problems produced a powerful combination of discontent. Faculty governance structures proved unable to bring the diverse interests of the academic community together, leaving the American professoriate permanently divided and politicized (Altbach, 1994). For their part, faculty turned their attention from undergraduate education, abandoned *in loco parentis*, and allowed the undergraduate curriculum to fall into disarray. The 60s student movement, in the eyes of some, was the most anti-market social and political movement of the 20th century and destroyed any cohesiveness in the undergraduate curriculum. As Altbach (1985) has noted, "The American undergraduate curriculum had become a supermarket where each department offered its wares and the institution was only a sum of its parts." In the 60's, it has been charged, "the schools turned away from traditional educational issues and became institutions to ensure adjustment to massive social change (Vietnam, student activism, civil rights movement, desegregation, drugs, discipline). Part of the problem was that politicians turned to the schools for solutions to difficult social problems and educators, happy with increased funding, were willing to attempt everything" (Altbach, 1985).

Levine (1978) describes the dominant educational philosophies of the 60s as education for life (relevance) and personal development. O'Banion notes that this humanistic education movement was in direct reaction to behavioristic and psychoanalytic theories which viewed humans as passive beings governed by past experience (O'Banion, 1972). Experiments, which were largely structural changes, included new interdisciplinary studies such as ethnic studies and women's studies. In retrospect, many educators, as well as the public and legislators, would condemn the 60s as well as the 70s as a time of loosened and lowered academic standards.

Cycles of relaxed curricular requirements to provide more choice for students give way to cycles of tightened requirements to increase "rigor." This reaction to impose quality control when standards and performance are perceived to be poor would be the foundation of the 1980's reform movement.

As noted above, the years from 1958 to 1968 saw an enormous expansion of the higher education sector and its emphasis on the elusive dimension of quality, spurred by concern that the American technology was falling behind that of the Soviets. Access continued to be a critical issue. President Johnson's War on Poverty legislation (1964) led to the creation of the Work Study program and special grants to minority students. In 1965, the Higher Education Act provided subsidized loans for students. This period closed with Lecht's 1966 report that articulated a set of national goals and translated them to quantitative terms for 1970 and 1975. The goals were a 100% increase in the high school graduation rate and a 50% increase in the number of students going to college. The Lecht report marked the end of an era that reflected an almost unfounded optimism about the prospects for higher education (Hansen & Stampen, 1994).

The 1970s: "Not a Happy Time"

The years from 1968 to 1981 brought a sharp change of focus. The first part of this period was characterized by a search for ways to broaden opportunities for students to attend college, initiated by the federal student loan programs in 1965 and culminating with the federal decision in 1972 to establish a national need-based student aid system based on the Pell grants (earlier called Basic Educational Opportunity Grants). From 1972-73 onward, it was a time for consolidating the system and resolving equity problems, revealing the great difficulties in dealing effectively with these issues. Earlier in 1968, the Brookings Institution and Clark Kerr

had issued *An Agenda for a Nation* . Six major issues were identified: equality of educational opportunity; financing; new technology; shortage of Ph.D. and M.Ds; need for metropolitan universities to develop an urban focus; and special financial difficulties of black, liberal arts, and state colleges. Kerr pushed for solutions through federal funding (Hansen & Stampen, 1994). Subsequent reports from the Carnegie Center for Higher Education and the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare recommended a federally financed system of need-based student financial aid and direct institutional grants tied to the number of students on financial aid. The obvious objective was to promote greater equality of educational opportunity.

However, the Golden Age for higher education was soon to end. Support for these initiatives began to erode because of sharp inflation, increased enrollments, and the ascendancy of other social priorities (Hansen & Stampen, 1994). In 1978 , the Middle Income Student Assistance Act was passed, which eliminated financial need as a requirement for applying for aid from the subsidized Guaranteed Student Loan program. Borrowing replaced grants as the most common form of student aid. This large scale movement of middle-income students into the ranks of aid recipients also became a focus of controversy. Throughout this period, colleges and universities continued to grapple with a myriad of problems associated with student unrest that had begun in the late 1960s (Hansen & Stampen, 1994). Meanwhile, many were beginning to experience difficulty maintaining sufficient resources to support instruction. Unfortunately, "educators did not take this opportunity to rethink educational priorities" (Altbach, 1985).

The 70s saw a decline in the resources available to higher education, a decline which would continue through the 80s and into the 90s. The economic situation also helped shift the focus toward concerns about work. Students became consumers, looking for curriculum that was

relevant to the marketplace (Toombs, 1991). It was no accident that this period saw marked growth in the number of community colleges and public technical institutes. Such growth was supported by an allocation of 22% of Title I funds from the Higher Education Facilities Act.

Faculty were impacted negatively in several ways during this time. As noted above, an abnormally large cohort of young academics had entered the profession in the 1960s. This generation of faculty expected a continuing improvement in the working conditions of higher education. When the 1970s dashed those hopes, morale suffered and adjustment continues to be difficult even twenty years later (Altbach, 1994). In addition, the tenure system came under attack in the 70s. Originally intended to protect academic freedom, the tenure system grew into a means of evaluating assistant professors as well as offering lifetime appointments. Although the intense debate about the tenure system that characterized the 70s eventually waned, the debate had a perhaps predictable result: unionization. The growth of academic unions in the 70s was a direct reaction to the difficulties faced by the professoriate in this period, although the effect has been mixed. It has been noted that "[despite gains in working conditions] the legal structure of the American campus clearly left ultimate authority with the board and secondarily, the administration" (Thelin, 1994). In addition to the threat to tenure, the profession had seen its economic status eroded after a decade of significant gains in "real income" during the 60s. Academic salaries began to decline in terms of actual purchasing power in the 70s. Finally, there was the beginning of an erosion of public confidence in American higher education that included a lack of confidence in the professoriate. It was based on a historic mistrust of professors and manifested itself in the American preference for having colleges governed by an external board with virtually no legal power accruing to the collective faculty.

The unprecedented growth in American higher education during this period set the stage for what was to become the decade of reform. It would be the result of a reaction against the post-war focus on access and a reactionary movement toward quality.

The 1980s: A Decade of Reform

> As several reports stated, we just don't know how good or bad the schools are; all we really know at this point is that, for a diversity of reasons, most Americans seem to be dissatisfied with the schools and that, in and of itself, makes educational reform a priority. (Kelly, 1985)

As American higher education entered the 1980s, the environment was an unstable one. The Golden Age had come to an end; there were no longer adequate resources to support expansion. As both federal and private funding increased, so did the requirements that colleges and universities be held more accountable for those funds. Thus, there were external pressures in the form of increasing expectations on the part of both the public and private sectors. Internally, there was concern that the loosened requirements of the 60s and the postwar emphasis on access that continued through the 70s had weakened the curriculum to the point where America was not adequately preparing a workforce that was capable of competing in a global economy. Students were less interested in issues of social justice and more anxious about obtaining employment. Faculty were unsettled, in terms of both their working conditions and their perceptions that academic standards had been threatened by the loosened standards of the previous decades, coupled with an influx of nontraditional students. Increasingly, concern was expressed about whether the American public school system and higher education were achieving acceptable levels of "excellence" and "quality."

The 1980s would prove to be one of the more important reform periods in American higher education. While the issues would not be unique, the environment would be. This time, new technology had speeded up the rate of change. Most important, this time the system would not receive massive funding to help cope with the changes brought about by reform efforts (Altbach, 1985). Although federal expectations (e.g., mainstreaming) increased, there was not a corresponding infusion of funding or even sufficient time to adjust. Schools were simply unable to respond to all the burdens placed on them.

One of the major changes was in the funding sources for higher education. As Kerr (1994) has noted, periods of federal leadership in this area have been relatively brief: 1860-90 and 1955-85. Between 1955 and 1985, federal student financial aide represented a powerful injection of new resources into the higher education system, enough so that by 1980-81, the amount of financial aid would have been more than sufficient to eliminate tuition and other assessments against all students. However, several factors diluted the impact of federal support, which was largely distributed in the form of financial aid. These factors included:

1. Tuition and other costs of attendance rose faster than aid;
2. Available aid was spread over a larger student population, including short term vocational education provided by proprietary schools;
3. The emphasis in federal aid shifted from grants to loans (Gladieux et al., 1994).

Then came the 1980 elections and a new administration determined to shrink domestic social spending. The Reagan administration slashed funding for education by 25%. As a result, the growth era in federal student assistance was clearly over (Gladieux et al., 1994).

As a result, states assumed a more important role in funding. McGuinness (1994) notes that states increased support for higher education in the mid 80s in all but a few cases. State funding

increased from 30-32 % while federal support declined from 20 to 26%. Even though the state share of funding increased in the 80s, in fact, the most dramatic increases in higher education revenue actually came from students and their parents and from other private sources. Even more important than providing financial support, the states took the lead in higher education reform in absence of any national policy. From 1985-1993, approximately 33 states had special studies or blue-ribbon commissions on higher education (McGuinness, 1994).

During the 1980s, it was the states which not only took the lead in reform but also the states which led a fundamental change in the definition of accountability. Up to that point, states had focused primarily on issues of resource allocation and utilization and rarely became involved in basic questions about the outcomes of a college or university education. By the end of the 80s, questions about outcomes – especially student outcomes – dominated states' agendas (McGuinness, 1994). States also led in developing new funding systems, such as competitive, incentive and performance funding.

Beginning in 1980-81 and continuing to the present is a sharp swing away from concerns about equity and access and toward concerns about quality, efficient use of resources, and broadened missions. The national elections of 1980 marked an abrupt shift from an almost exclusive focus on equity concerns to one emphasizing economic and political reform, including issues such as academic performance and institutional improvement. The reform report, *A Nation At Risk*, a Reagan initiative, renounced pre-existing policies as leading to economic, political, and social decline. Other similar reports were less dramatic but generally supported the need to raise educational standards, even though none was very specific about how this might be accomplished. Shortly thereafter, a similar series of reports began to appear that focused on higher education.

The 1980s saw an unprecedented revival of 1940's reforms (Stark & Lattuca, 1997) as stakeholders became more concerned about quality. A plethora of reports was issued, the first wave of which was directed toward the public elementary and secondary systems and began with *A Nation at Risk*, sponsored by the National Commission on Excellence (1983). This was the first report to capture public attention because of its sweeping indictment of precollegiate education. A second wave of reports followed which targeted higher education and which was equally critical. These reports included *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* (Bennet, 1984), *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (National Institute of Education ,1984) *and Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community* (Association of American Colleges, 1984/5). The conclusions of these reports – all of which expressed a concern for quality – were the impetus for yet another shift in higher education toward a common core curriculum and against what was perceived to be excessive specialization promoted by overly autonomous academic departments to the detriment of liberal learning (Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

Kelly (1985) observes that the reports generated during the 1980s were remarkably similar in many ways. Few of the reports suggested changes in the ways schools were organized, changes in the way in which knowledge was distributed within them, or changes in the conditions of teaching and learning. Most of the reports, in short, proposed reform of content without necessarily proposing reform in the way in which knowledge was presented in schools and the ways schools were organized. Second, most reports were very critical of the nation's primary and secondary teachers and saw them, rather than the conditions under which they worked, as key to educational quality. Third, in many of the reports, school reform was a matter for individual schools and not a matter for any level of government or the business community.

There was little agreement, however, as to who should take responsibility for bringing about excellence in education – parents, teachers, school administrators, the states or the federal government (Kelly, 1985). Trow (1994) concluded that the reports did more harm than good "because these reports, by substituting prescription for analysis, misled our supporters and the general public into believing that these difficult problems are simpler then they are."

It is important to understand why these reports appeared when they did, just as it is important to understand who generated them. As noted above, their conclusions were reactions to several forces: the reforms made in the 1960s, the effects of declining resources in the 70s and 80s, and changing perceptions of key constituencies about the purpose of higher education. Whereas the 1960s and 1970s had been concerned with access of underrepresented constituencies in academe, the 1980s could be characterized by concerns over quality, a characteristic response of academe to periods of "loosened" standards and increased diversity (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Another reason cited for the deterioration of the quality of the curriculum was the lack of leadership in education (Toombs, 1991).

Not everyone agreed with the reports. There were those who were critical of them and of their authors' motives. Despite the fact that the problems of the schools were well known, the debate did not emerge from grass-roots concern. Rather, it has been argued that most of the reports and investigations that led to the current debate were the result of a coordinated effort by America's educational and corporate elite, groups that had never been committed to the egalitarian thrust of the post-war period (Altbach, 1985).

It has been asserted that the current debate on education was stimulated by at least three stakeholders: the Reagan administration, which had its own agenda; the corporate sector; and the elite universities. Altbach (1985) notes, "Excellence sounds like a good thing and there is

universal agreement that the schools do need some added attention and , perhaps, some significant changes." But, he adds, "the very unity of views of the reforms should have given us pause. Once we had looked carefully at where the recommendations were coming from as well as their content, it should have been clear that a critical assessment was necessary" (Altbach, 1985).

The concept of an external commission formed to conduct an objective study was a process which created much skepticism. Peterson (1985) observed that broadly representative commissions without responsibility or power, except for whatever influence that media attention may have led to, were ill equipped for the task of policy analysis. A "successful" commission report, according to Peterson, was likely to have several questionable characteristics:

- The report was almost certain to exaggerate the problem it addressed.
- The report would state only broad, general objectives.
- The report would recommend changes that were beyond current technology and resources.
- The report would not spell out the details of its proposed innovations.
- The report would seldom call for institutional reorganization.
- The report would poorly document the value of the solutions it proposed.

In addition to concerns about the motives and abilities of commissions to assess education, some theorists felt that the authors of the reports did not focus sufficiently on how education operates in American society. They treated it as a nonpolitical activity when alternative theorists such as Freire and others had convincingly argued from a Marxist viewpoint that education was in fact highly political. Moreover, it was charged that the authors also isolated curriculum and instruction from other problems (Apple, 1985; Toombs, 1991).

What was the impact of the reform movements of the 1980s? While there are those theorists who acknowledge that there was an increased level of interest and discussion and more attention was paid to issues of excellence and accountability, most seem to agree that the 80s were a decade of much talk and little action and that the long-term impact in terms of measurable change ranged from sporadic to negligible. *An American Imperative*, produced by the Wingspread Group, asserted that the first alarms (of the 80s) may not have been heard and fully comprehended (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). As Spitzberg (1994) observed, "Rarely have so many faculty and off-campus kibitzers said so much to achieve so little. This is likely to be the judgment history will render about curriculum reform in American higher education in the 1980s."

While Stark (1997) maintains that the reforms of the 80s at least spawned an atypical level of discussion, O'Banion flatly states that the "reform effort launched by *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 [was] a spectacular failure" (O'Banion, 1972). It is still questionable how much change has really taken place. It may be that insufficient time has passed to accurately assess the kind and degree of change. In respect to institutional change, Kovalik (1994) notes that Karen Olson, of the California State Department of Education, "observes that she has never seen a transformed school stay transformed for more than six years; schools always 'go back' to the way it's always been." Kovalik charges that "the reason such reform efforts have failed is primarily because we have never abandoned our notions about subject area 'disciplines' and the belief that the purpose of schooling is mastery of identified content based upon a world view forged during the middle ages" (Kovalik, 1994). While there has been more focus on general versus specialized education and more emphasis on the instructional process, as Stark observes, "the victory for active learning may be ephemeral – more evident in theory and advocacy than in

practice . . . there is, as yet, only limited evidence that most traditional college lecturers have radically changed their ways of teaching" (Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

The 1990s: The Time of Troubles

Stark (1997) has identified five debates about higher education in the 1990s. They are similar but not identical to those identified by Clark Kerr in 1977: education purpose, diversity of learners, instructional process, evaluation, and content.

Education Purpose: Included in this area are issues about whether or to what degree the undergraduate curriculum ought to be vocational, whether undergraduates should specialize, and whether education should transmit a core of common cultural values or reflect the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds.

Diversity of Learners: Kerr termed debates on this issue "elitism vs. egalitarianism" and "mass vs. individualized education." Stark observes that while it is difficult to identify deliberate periods of elitism, it is possible to identify alternating periods of stronger and weaker emphasis on access. Stark maintains that the overall, long-term trend is toward wider access, however.

Content: In 1977, Kerr referred to this debate as "prescription vs. choice." This issue reflects the rapid expansion of knowledge and disciplines and "involves questions of institutional mission as well as the balance between general and specialized education" (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Previously, decisions about content were driven by educator's perceptions of students' needs. Now those decisions are driven by government officials because of outside and public funding. What was an internal issue is now more external.

Instructional Process: This area is probably the one in which the least change has occurred over time, although as Stark (1997) observes, there have been periods of modest experimentation. The advent of the Information Age and new technology, however, may well initiate revolutionary change in terms of instructional design and delivery. During a recent on-line conference sponsored by the community college system of Hawaii, one of the most discussed topics was how to structure on-line activities [Teaching in Community Colleges On-Line: Trends and Issues, 1998]. There have also been significant new advances in cognitive psychology, especially in the area of andragogy, which are slowly being digested and implemented by faculty (Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

Evaluation: The 90s could be referred to as the Age of Accountability, or at least the call for accountability. As Stark (1997) notes, "higher education evaluation and adjustment mechanisms have remained idiosyncratic and unsystematic." One example of increased expectations in this area is the substantial revision of accreditation standards for community colleges by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Colleges must be able to demonstrate not only the capacity for data collection and analysis but that they have actually used the information to improve programs and services in a cycle of continuous assessment and adjustment.

Overall, Stark (1997) sees these debates embedded within a steady movement toward diversification in curriculum. She also notes that these debates are largely the result of external influences such as social turbulence related to economic developments; technological developments (industrial and information revolutions); international economic competition; and international or domestic conflicts. In contrast, internal influences, e.g., debates within colleges and universities, have been of little consequence.

It is because of the power of external influences over higher education that the 1990s have been called "the time of troubles" (Kerr, 1994). As Stark (1997) observed, it is society, not higher education itself who is the primary initiator of change. For the first time, higher education is mostly the reactive defender of the *status quo* rather than the joint initiator or at least a cooperative partner. Kerr (1994) explains that society is the aggressor for several reasons: (1) society has fewer new resources to spread around; (2) society has more claimants on those resources; (3) American society demands that higher education, as never before, concentrate on support of the economy, engaged as it is in intensified international economic competitions. "The number one priority is now clearly being given to advancing human capability, with educational justice in second place, with lesser places (if any at all) to developmental growth, pure learning, or an evaluation (criticism) of society" (Kerr, 1994). Society in the 90s is demanding of higher education a reordering of priorities and a more efficient use of resources.

In respect to resources, there are several key issues and they involve the relationship between the federal and state governments in higher education. The issues at the federal level have to do with federal financial aid, as well as the "strings" attached to federal grants which give the federal government more say in the university's internal decisions. The Higher Education Act is scheduled for renewal in 1998 and financial aid has been a major point of discussion.

McGuinness (1994) notest that the relationship between the state governments and higher education is likely to be especially strained because of five broad trends:

1. The escalating demands of an increasingly diverse student population.
2. Severe economic constraints. As mentioned above, resources are fewer and must be stretched among more claimants.

3. The academy's inherent resistance to change. The resulting public frustration with the academe's inability to respond to major societal needs only intensifies the danger of blunt government intervention.
4. The negative climate of public opinion. As McGuinness notes, the American public values higher education greatly, but they see it being directed by a largely internal agenda disconnected from major societal priorities and mismanaged in ways that make it increasingly inaccessible, especially in terms of cost.
5. Instability of state political leadership. The trend toward term limits and the demands of public office are contributing to major changes in the state leadership.

One indication of this uneasy relationship is the increased number of government proposals to consider substantive reorganization of higher education. The severing of Kentucky's community college system from the four-year system is one example. The proposal to eliminate remedial education from community colleges in New York is another.

In 1992, a national survey of state higher education agencies and system governing boards was conducted by the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) (McGuinness, 1994). Responses were collected from four-year and two-year systems. The survey was intended to focus on faculty workload issues, but the responses revealed a great deal about other issues which were important to states and higher education systems. Following is a list of the top five of those issues ranked as "very important" in order of frequency of their mention. Items mentioned the same number of times are listed together.

1. Adequacy of overall state financial support
2. Quality of undergraduate education
3. Minority student access and achievement; effectiveness and accountability

4. Teacher education and preparation; tuition rates and overall costs
5. Faculty workload and productivity; workforce training and education

Respondents were than asked to separate financial from non-financial issues. The three most important financial issues for the 90s, in ranked order, were:

1. Inadequacy or decline in level of state support; retrenchment; need to downsize
2. Shifting balance between state support and tuition revenues; concern about high tuition and student access
3. General uncertainty; concern about level of state support

The top three most important non-financial issues were:

1. Public perceptions; accountability; effectiveness; efficiency; and productivity
2. Quality of undergraduate education; access issues
3. Faculty issues – workload, commitment to teaching

According to McGuinness (1994), these responses illustrate how much issues of quality and equity are linked. They also show the extent to which financing issues can no longer be considered in isolation. The higher education debate has shifted decidedly from an emphasis on means (quantity and adequacy of resources) toward basic questions of ends (what should students know and be able to do and what public purposes are to be served by the enterprise.)

The Future

The 80s concern with excellence in education, a concern which continues into the 90s, is a classic case of how Americans perceive problems and develop solution, according to Altbach (1985). The excellence debates of the 80's are the direct result of previous policies and of long-standing American confusion concerning the role of the schools in society. The current "crisis"

reflects the fact that social goals have shifted from a stress on equity and the solution of societal problems through education, which characterized the 1960s, to a focus on academic and technological achievement that will enable the nation to compete in an increasingly difficult world market. Educational institutions change slowly, and the schools are now "out of sync" with broader social policy (Altbach, 1985).

What lies ahead for higher education? Since many of the issues that have arisen in the 80s and 90s have yet to be satisfactorily addressed, they will continue to be issues in the 21st century. For example, higher education will probably face continuing budgetary constraints and uncertainty for the immediate future, primarily because it is one of the few discretionary areas in state budgets. As yet, the federal and the state governments have shown little inclination to respond with called-for new resources. Instead, attention has been focused on new demands for accountability in using existing resources (Hansen & Stampen, 1994). Although the nation's economic recession was primarily responsible for state budget cuts to higher education during the late 80s and early 90s, these cuts also reflected growing demands upon the state treasury from competing social programs such as the public schools, health and prisons. In California, the higher education budget was slashed 25%, partly to fund corrections, the fastest growing segment of the state's budget.

The implications of institutional retrenchment and reallocation are that higher education institutions will be forced to make long-term, fundamental cuts to programs and faculty and to restructure and narrow institutional programs and priorities. Zusman (1994) asserts that the effect of reprioritization and restructuring will impact all areas of higher education. For example:

Faculty. Institutions have begun cutting faculty in other ways than termination, such as reducing new hires, offering generous early retirement incentives, and terminating non-tenure track faculty. Conversely, many institutions have hired more part-time temporary faculty at lower salaries and benefits. It is estimated that about half of all college instructors are now ineligible for tenure (Zusman, 1994). A paradox exists, however. Only a few years ago, many analysts predicted dramatic faculty shortages after 1997 (if not earlier) because of expected high levels of faculty retirement, increasing enrollment demand, and inadequate supply of new Ph.Ds. Now, with the potential "downsizing" of institutions, these shortages may not materialize (Zusman, 1994).

Academic programs: To date, program impacts have been largely unplanned. Zusman (1994) observes that generally programs cut have been identified as academically weak, high cost, having low market demand, or less central to institutional mission or state need. As budget constraints force institutions to cut academic offerings, the challenge for higher education will be to make planned, strategic decisions as quickly as possible. To this end, institutions will need to revise program review processes designed during an era of growth, which typically are more effective in preventing the establishment of new programs than in consolidating or eliminating existing programs. To maintain institutional priorities, it will be especially important for institutions to reallocate scarce dollars to support important areas unlikely to be sustained by extramural dollars, such as the humanities. Based on faculty retrenchment cases in the 80s, Slaughter (1985) suggests that departments serving primarily women and/or fields unable to tie themselves to market needs may be disproportionately cut.

Students: If institutions continue to raise student tuition in response to budget constraints, low-income students and historically underrepresented ethnic groups are at risk of being excluded

unless sufficient financial aid is provided (Zusman, 1994). Dramatic increases in public tuition were a consequence of the fiscal crisis of the early 1990s. In 1991-92, California increased fees by 40% or more (McGuinness, 1994). Moreover, institutions will have to continue to respond to changing student demographics. The projected growth in the student pool, referred to in California as Tidal Wave II, will increase the demand for higher education. A larger proportion of the pool will be comprised of historically underrepresented groups. As more diverse students enter college, they will help change the face of the campus and the nature of its programs and services (Zusman, 1994).

Higher education as a whole. One could assume as costs rise, enrollment will shift from private to public and from 4-year institutions to 2-year colleges. However, that assumption is based on another: that two-year colleges will have the resources to enroll more students and that students can afford their rising fees. In such an enrollment squeeze, nontraditional students, including returning adults and those whose initial preparation precludes admission at other institutions, may well be shut out of traditionally open-door community colleges (Zusman, 1994).

Administration and governance. The past 30 years have seen a "revolutionary transformation" in the governance of higher education, from single-campus governance to large, complex and heterogeneous multicampus systems. Nearly 75% of all students enrolled in US public higher education institutions now attend campuses that are part of a multicampus system. There exist over 120 systems, and over 1,000 campuses (Zusman, 1994).

Zusman observes that although the functions and powers of these systems vary substantially, systemwide governing boards and administrations have the potential for exercising broad leverage over their campuses through budget and program review powers. They also pose

threats to campus autonomy and flexibility if they attempt to impose an inappropriately standardized set of priorities or expectations. Systems increase bureaucratization and make faculty-shared governance more difficult to achieve. One result of budget constraints may be greater centralization of authority. For the immediate future, the challenge for higher education institutions will be to find ways to respond more quickly to urgent needs that require tough decisions while maintaining essential faculty consultation (Zusman, 1994). Shared governance is a hallowed concept on most campuses, but it is not an efficient decision-making process and may be a model ill-suited at its present stage to a time of rapid change.

Leadership is another important factor in the future of higher education, at both the local and systemwide levels. Yet the exercise of effective leadership may become more difficult. The average tenure of presidents of mostly public research institutions declined from 4.6 years in 1980 to 3.2 years in 92 (Zusman, 1994).

Institutional Infrastructure. According to the Association of Physical Plant Administrators (Zusman, 1994), the backlog of deferred maintenance and replacement of existing facilities in US Colleges and universities was approaching one hundred billion dollars as of 91-92, up from about forty billion dollars a decade earlier. There are signs, however, that the public is somewhat more willing to finance much needed repairs and modifications to facilities. In April of 1998, voters in California approved 29 out of 49 general obligation bonds, for a 59% passage rate and a total of $1,014,790,000. The approval is significant because California requires a 2/3 (67%) majority for approval of bonds. Even so, School Services of California cautions that success rates are "inflated by a rigorous self-selection process." Districts who do not believe they have a chance of winning do not attempt to put a bond issue or parcel tax on the ballot. In

fact, most California school districts have not attempted a ballot measure since 1978 (School Services of California, 1998).

For society as a whole, the twenty-first century promises to bring new and continuing challenges, among them economic constraints, demographic shifts, changes in national and international economies and power structures, and technological complexity (Zusman, 1994). As for higher education,

> . . . [it] will not be able to stand aside from demands that it help society meet these changes through developing a highly skilled workforce, mediating social mobility, and advancing research development and service directed toward economic and social considerations. At the same time it will face increasing competition from other claimants for public support…In short, policy makers as well as students, parents, and the private sector, are demanding changes in the social contract between higher education and its constituencies. The challenge for higher education institutions will be to take the initiative in determining their priorities (including deciding what they cannot do during an era of constraints). (Zusman, 1994)

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